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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 007974

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: EURODIPLOMATS IN ANKARA SAY TURKEY'S EU CANDIDACY
GAINING MOMENTUM

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Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch; reasons 1.5 b and d.

1. (C) Summary: EU-member-state diplomats in Ankara say the EU is headed toward offering Turkey a conditional date for accession talks, possibly in January 2004. Our contacts say Germany holds the key; local German diplomats agree Berlin feels under pressure not to block Turkey's candidacy. UK and Danish diplomats say their countries strongly back Turkey. The diplomats agree their governments are willing to work with the newly elected AK Party government, though some are wary of AK's perceived Islamist roots. End Summary.

TURKEY'S CANDIDACY GAINING MOMENTUM

2. (C) Poloff discussed the state of Turkey's EU candidacy and the impact of the landslide victory of the Islam-influenced AK Party in the November 3 national elections (Reftel A) with German, Danish and British diplomats November 4 and 5. The Eurodiplomats agreed Turkey's candidacy has gained momentum since the October 9 release of EU Commission reports that did not recommend offering Turkey a date for accession talks (Reftel B). They said a strong consensus is emerging in favor of offering Turkey a date to start accession talks, on the condition that the GOT implements further reforms. According to our contacts, the details will not be hammered out until shortly before the December 12-13 EU Summit in Copenhagen, but one scenario being widely discussed in EU circles would establish the following steps: Turkey's candidacy will be reviewed again at the December 2003 EU Summit; if Turkey at that time meets political criteria for membership, accession talks will begin in January 2004. A Danish diplomat said this was the best-case scenario, possible if there is a breakthrough on Cyprus and a strong commitment by the new Turkish government to the EU membership process before the December Summit. A weaker version of the EU offer would state that Turkey will start accession talks at an unspecified date in 2004.

GOT WANTS 2003 DATE

3. (C) GOT officials accept privately that the EU will attach conditions to any date offered. Still, they insist the EU must mention a specific date, preferably in 2003, before 10 new states become members in 2004. Inan Ozyildiz, foreign affairs advisor to the President, told Poloff the Turkish public will not understand if countries such as Malta and Lithuania, not to mention Cyprus, join the EU before Turkey has even begun accession talks. He said Turks are very proud, and may turn their back on the EU if they feel slighted. Also, he said, the new members might try to block Turkey's accession once they attain EU voting rights. The Ankara-based Eurodiplomats said they are aware of Turkish sensitivities, but the EU members also have to worry about their own constituencies. By offering to start talks in January 2004, the EU would be setting a date far enough in the future to ease member-state anxieties about Turkey, but early enough to show the Turks they are being treated fairly.

BERLIN FEELING THE HEAT

4. (C) According to our contacts, Germany holds the key to the December Summit. They say other major EU states are either supportive of Turkey's candidacy or are staying on the sidelines. The UK appears to be Turkey's strongest backer --

a British diplomat told Poloff the UK will do everything it can to see that the EU offers Turkey a forward-leaning conditional date. Term president Denmark and Italy are apparently also very supportive. France is a mystery -- both the GOT and diplomats from other EU states have told Emboffs they don't know where Paris stands. Most of the smaller states are indifferent, and Greece is no longer putting up opposition. Two German diplomats told Poloff Berlin does not want to be seen as the obstacle in Turkey's path. "If Turkey does not get in, they will blame us," one of them said. They lamented the fact that Germany, which would be most affected by Turkish membership, is being pressured by other countries with a much smaller stake in the matter. They said they were caught off guard when German FM Fischer recently made public statements strongly supporting Turkey's candidacy. The German Embassy is usually more pro-Turkey than Berlin, and now the positions are reversed.

15. (C) A Danish diplomat told Poloff his government has noticed a sudden change in Germany's approach. At the October 21-22 EU Foreign Ministers meeting, both Fischer and UK FS Straw urged participants to think about Turkey as a strategic ally in the struggle against terrorism. The EU, they said, needed to support Turkey to show that Islam could co-exist with democracy and prosperity. The Danish diplomat noted that in the past the UK had been alone in making this U.S.-style argument in EU meetings. "They (the Germans) are starting to talk like you guys," he said.

SIGNIFICANCE OF GOT REFORMS SINKS IN

16. (C) The Eurodiplomats said EU support for Turkey is increasing primarily because the significance of the GOT's recent reforms has begun to sink in. In particular, they said, EU states were surprised by the extent of the GOT's August reform package (Reftel C), which dealt with the most sensitive issues -- such as the death penalty and Kurdish language rights -- that the GOT had avoided in earlier reform efforts. Before August, EU-member governments had assumed Turkey would be so far from meeting membership criteria that its candidacy would not have to be seriously addressed at the December Summit. Now, they understand the GOT has launched a serious reform effort that the EU must help keep on track.

EU WILLING TO WORK WITH AK

17. (C) It is not yet clear how the electoral triumph of the Islam-influenced AK party will affect this process. The Eurodiplomats said their governments were determined to give AK the benefit of the doubt, given the party's pro-EU stance during the campaign. Still, there are anxieties below the surface in some EU capitals about AK's perceived Islamist roots, according to our contacts. The German diplomats said AK's rise to power is "not a boost" to Turkey's candidacy, as it will heighten fears among the German public about taking in a large, Muslim country as an EU member.

PEARSON